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Ethnic Images and Strategies in 1944

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Ethnic Images and Strategies in 1944[1]

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Guatemala in 1944 was on the verge of a great transition that was to continue over the next several decades. Since independence it had experienced a long, if irregular, era of liberal expansion, marked most clearly by the adoption of coffee cultivation and its conversion into a country dedicated to the export of that crop. While historians may disagree on periodization, it is not misleading to see the general society as evolving under a nineteenth-century liberal economic framework that continued up through World War II. The period from 1944 to 1954 (the "Revolution") was an era of significant reform but terminated in failure and thus marked no significant divergence from the liberal framework.

Despite some well-ensconced myths about its love for Indians, the dictatorship of Jorge Ubico (1931–1944) followed the track of the classic liberal state; it did nothing to alleviate the economic and social repression of the Indian. Its vagrancy law put an end to debt servitude, but simply took the control exercised by landowners over Indians and placed it more directly in the hands of the state. It centralized rule over local governments with *intendentes,* and all but eliminated petty graft from the country while at the same time tyrannizing political opposition. In economic and foreign affairs it favored the expansion of U.S. capital and U.S. priorities. Ubico's rule collapsed under the wave of internal and external changes that buffeted Guatemala during World War II (Handy 1984: 100).

Following a bourgeois revolution in 1944, the dictatorship ended and a ten-year revolutionary regime made a serious effort to recognize interests of the rural poor. This offended both the landowners and the army; so with direct help from the CIA, the government of the revolution was overthrown in 1954. The government then continued under the more conservative forces, but beginning about 1963, the military effectively took over. This began what must be seen as a new era of the military state, under which governments were to be variously controlled directly by military officers or by surrogate civilians whom they allowed to take power through elections with constricted electoral slates.

The present essay draws on materials from the principal newspapers of the period and concerns the state of ethnic relations at the very beginning of the decade of the revolutionary era, 1944–1954. When the liberal dictator, Ubico, resigned on 30 June 1944, he was replaced in a quick power play by one of his generals, Federico Ponce V. Elections were then scheduled for December, with the new president scheduled to take office in March 1945. The popular candidate was Juan José Arévalo, a self-exiled philosophy professor from the University of Tucumán, Argentina. Ponce, in an effort to gain popular votes in the countryside, passed the word that he would, if elected, divide among the Indians the extensive German-owned coffee farm lands that had been intervened by the Guatemalan government during World War II.

As it became increasingly clear that Ponce's chance of winning the election was slight, he apparently sent further word that should the Indians want "their lands," they should take some action.[2] Whether this was the necessary and sufficient condition is not currently clear, but the countryside experienced a growing unrest. In the following, we will examine how events concerning the indigenous population were represented in the Guatemala City newspapers during the period of August through December 1944, together with other news reports that appeared through 1948.

No contemporary society can long live in an open situation of atrocious relationships based, in the last analysis, on fear and hatred, if these characteristics are allowed overt expression. The materials reviewed here show such central issues to be hidden behind myths about the nature of the two ethnicities and their relations. Since it is an exclusively ladino literature—none of the materials are written by indigenes nor (with one possible exception) do they anywhere represent that view—only the ladino perspective is presented. In order to explore this, however, the final section of the paper addresses the question of ethnic strategies.

Events of this era appeared in the daily press both as news, usually on the front page if deemed of sufficient interest, and as editorials, usually on the inside and often contributed by private individuals. These news reports are a resource not merely for information on events of the epoch, but also as they reflect attitudes and opinions of the era. Much of what they say by implication and style was not new to that period and, in fact, continues today. The year 1944, however, was critical. While seen by many as the end of the dictatorship and the beginning of the Revolution, hindsight suggests that it was the beginning not only of the eventual transition to the military

state, but was also the start of the transition of the emergence of an Indian ethnicity of nation-state scope.

Indian and Ladino Behavior in the News

In an essay entitled, "A Sea of Indians: Ethnic Conflict and the Guatemalan Revolution 1944–1952,"[3] Jim Handy cites a rash of Indian uprisings that took place between 1944 and 1952. Newspapers were ready to report threats of Indian attack on those seen to block the Indian access to the lands promised by Ponce, and thereby openly expressed the fear that ladinos felt for violent Indian uprisings. In September 1944 there was a large demonstration by *campesinos* in the neighborhood of La Aurora on the outskirts of Guatemala City, Guatemala. This was followed in October by uprisings in the towns of Patzicia and San Andres Itzapa in the Department of Chimaltenango, and alleged uprisings in San Juan Ostuncalco and Chichicastenango. From 1945 through 1948 further reported acts of Indian unrest came from the departments of Guatemala, Chiquimula, Baja Verapaz, Chimaltenango, Sololá, San Marcos and Huehuetenango.

It is interesting to catch the flavor of the reporting of these incidents as they were reported in 1944. An editorial referred to a 15 September demonstration, "with country people from various areas near the capital; and then, with threatening intentions, some hundreds of country people from the same region concentrated in the fields of La Aurora."[4] The author notes that it is sad that "these peaceful inhabitants will be contaminated with the poison of misguided politics with criminal aspects, taking them from their fields of work and forming them into a shock force ready to serve the malicious interests of a political party that is in conflict with—better said, in war to the death against—popular opinion." He refers to the "terrorist regime of Ponce" that promised country people lands in Chimaltenango, El Quiché, and other areas. This was the cause of the "spontaneous reaction among those people who felt themselves defrauded at the instigation of the very people who persisted in deceiving them, with the result now so evident."

On November 8th, under headlines announcing, "Indian Uprising Suppressed in Ostuncalco," *El Imparcial* reported that on 22 October 1944, an uprising had been promoted in that town by the mayor, Carlos Marroquín Barrios, and the secretary, Martín Castillo Recinos, "undesirable elements because of their affiliation with the

liberal party." It continued that "the residents realized the danger they were in when one of them was speaking casually with the local commandant. A number of Indians armed with clubs and machetes approached in a menacing attitude intending to attack them. Disarmed before they could attack, the Indians said they were acting under the instigation of the very same commandant. Later, all of the outskirts of the town were discovered to be full of armed Indians awaiting the agreed upon signal, the ringing of a bell."

Perhaps the strangest report came from Quezaltenango announcing a large uprising in Chichicastenango.

> The Department of Quiché is living with the anxiety inherited from the recent liberal progressive regime, now translated into a latent threat of Indians stirred up against ladinos.
>
> We have received letters from the Departmental capital complaining of the threat of the aborigines who have been trying to rise up to exterminate the ladinos or whites, in conformance with a plan provided by the propagandistas of General Ponce's Liberal Party during the recent election campaign, interrupted on the 20th of the current month.
>
> During the night of the 23rd—says our informant—we lived through tense hours here in the departmental capital because the arrival, in a war-like manner, of people from Quezaltenango was announced, and at the same time the news was circulated that 4,000 Indians of Chichicastenango had risen up against the ladinos of that town. In the midst of this affliction we were further disturbed by the passivity of the authorities of whom we had requested arms for self defense.

> In Chichicastenango—reported another informant from the capital of El Quiché—a capitan named Jesús Ramirez was trying to convince the Indians to revolt and was telling them that the new government—that of the revolution—would not give them "their lands." "Their lands," referred to the land formerly owned by the enemies of Guatemala [the Germans], the bone of contention used by the liberals

> for *poncista* propaganda and against the independent parties of Guatemala.
>
> We took note of this accusation from El Quiché because, in view of what happened in Patzicia, where the criminal efforts of the liberals resulted in the shedding of the blood of innocents, an uprising of Indians could be repeated in El Quiché, particularly in Chichicastenango where Capitan Ramirez had been stationed.[5]

In the 8 November 1944 issue of the same newspaper is an article reporting a petition from Chichicastenango with 100 signatures asking for the removal of Coronel Jesus Ramírez Mota. It concludes, "The citizens live in constant fear due to the hate that Colonal [*sic*] Ramirez sowed among the Indians against the Ladinos."

Clearly the most stunning of all the events reported was the massacre in Patzicia. It is not possible here to explore the details that appeared over a number of days following the event.[6] On 21 October at the instigation of individuals influenced by the Ponce arguments concerning the accessibility to land, some Indians of Patzicia attacked a number of ladino families. It was a bloody affair, in which children as well as women and men were slaughtered. News of the event was reported immediately to the departmental and national capitals and to neighboring towns. Armed ladinos came from nearby Zaragoza, and the Guardia Civil arrived from Guatemala, launching a further blood bath, which was summarized as "resulting in fourteen dead of the ladino race and uncountable Indian cadavers, numerous wounded of both races, and a deep fear in the hearts of Guatemalans unaccustomed to the unjustified reprisals of the Indians against the creoles—the terrible harvest of the absurd regime of the 108 days [i.e., the period of Ponce's rule]."[7]

Later it was noted that 254 people had submitted requests for aid for being damaged by the event, and 120 for recovery of material damages.[8] It was also reported that the Boy Scouts of Antigua, Guatemala, had provided economic assistance to 14 wounded people and the families of the 15 people killed at Patzicia—which, presumably, included no Indians.[9] What this tells of ladino behavior is most revealing in the almost total absence of concern about what happened to the Indians. The latter are merely an "uncountable number of cadavers," whereas details on the number of ladinos killed and the number given succor are carefully recorded.

The readiness of ladinos to turn to shooting was not entirely focused on Indians. In Quezaltenango on Sunday, 15 October, just after 6 p.m., shooting began near the market plaza full of Sunday crowds and started a terrified stampede of people trying to avoid being killed. It was attributed to the police and the army. One boy was killed. The events are attributed to efforts by agents of Ponce and to the then governor, Ernesto Ramírez (who was removed by the new jefe politico, Alfonso Arís, on October 22). It was then further observed that "in the final fifteen days of the regime of General Federico Ponce V., government spies multiplied at an alarming rate, men and women with unfamiliar faces were everywhere, and it is said that many of them added to the terror by shooting at defenseless individuals, the majority of whom were wounded in the back."[10]

In Guatemala City, these events appeared somewhat marginal as the October revolution was underway. This was a relatively bloody military action as more than three hundred wounded were treated in the General Hospital.[11] The Ponce forces were defeated and Arevalo's path to the presidency was assured during an interval in which the country was ruled by a triumvirate of two army officers and a civilian. There is no question but that Arevalo enjoyed an immensely broad basis of middle class support. What was obscured was the fact that the Patzicia massacre and the wide-ranging reports of insurgent Indians that preceded it reflected a serious doubt on the part of the indigenous population that their interests would be recognized by the liberal revolution. It also unquestionably increased the level of mutual fear on the part of ladinos and indigenes.

Indian and Ladino Traditional Behavior in Editorials

While much of the editorial writing reflects various aspects about ladino behavior, a broad analysis of such material is not possible here. Rather, I want merely to illustrate some of the reflections that appear with specific relation to the Indians.

One perspective is summed up in an editorial by Ovidio Rodas Corzo. After decrying the *indigenista* fervor in Mexico, he writes, "If I may be forgiven by mexican indianists, all that is good in Mexico, the dynamic and the promising, is Latin."[12]

More to the point is a three-part series by Luis Cardoza y Aragón, which takes the position that "The nation is Indian. This is the truth which first manifests itself with its enormous, subjugating, presence. And yet we know that in Guatemala, as in the

rest of America, it is the mestizo who has the leadership throughout the society. The mestizo: the middle class. The revolution of Guatemala is a revolution of the middle class."

"And what an inferiority complex the Guatemalan suffers for his indian blood, for the indigenous character of his nation!" "The Guatemalan does not want to be Indian, and wishes his nation were not."[13]

Rufino Guerra Cortave, in an editorial concerning Indians, writes: "The events of Patzicia are too recent to have been forgotten, the crimes at the top of the Santa Maria volcano in 1917 can still be remembered with horror, and we could relate many others, secure in the judgement that the perpetrators, those originally guilty, were not really the Indians but, rather, were shameless ladinos."[14]

The dangerous and menacing Indian behavior portrayed in the news articles was certainly well known at the time. The Chichicastenango parish priest remarked in the 1930s that "if organized and a bit educated the Indians might some night massacre all of the ladinos."[15] Jorge Schlesinger's work on the Salvadorean *matanza* observed that "the communist revolution of El Salvador teaches us to what lengths a people oppressed by hunger and stimulated by promises of immediate social vindication can go; and history repeats itself . . ."[16]

Yet, in spite of the news articles proclaiming the massacre of ladinos and reprisals on Indians in Patzicia, and of the threatening conduct reported from Chichicastenango, San Juan Ostuncalco, and elsewhere, the editorials essentially ignore the events. Instead of delving into the significance of these alleged occurrences, they revert to a genre that emerged at the end of the nineteenth century, an *indigenista* rhetoric that seeks to deplore, but rationalize, the condition of the Indian as being something that can be corrected without fundamentally endangering the liberal approach.

Characteristic are the following (with emphases added by the present writer).

1. Indians are low and despicable.

Luis Cardoza y Aragón summarizes well how the Indian is generally treated: "almost always with depreciation, pejoratively. He is represented as being guilty of everything."[17] Indeed, the literature is fierce in this respect. There follow a few examples of how this appears in print; it should be remembered, however, that not all these are said as direct assertions, but as being representative of the common attitude.

"We generally recognize that we are opposed to these compatriots, ignorant, filthy, lazy, sick, licentious, without consciousness. We have often felt ourselves rebel against their evilness. We have also found ourselves in agreement with those who would favor their gradual disappearance by whatever means that would progressively diminish their ranks.

"In addition, when we have witnessed row upon row of these robust but moronic beings bending low to kiss the bloody hand of their own unholy excutioners, without the most minimal revulsion, we have wished that the earth would swallow them up, never to reappear."[18]

"Four centuries of oppression, cruelty and systematic brutalization of the native has made him so indolent and apathetic that he is resigned to his lot." "When it is said that the Indian is lazy, a cheat, a liar, ill adapted to work, one who needs to be constantly oppressed because he is an irresponsible subject who does not respect the obligations he has contracted, one forgets that this is due to his lack of education and inadaptability and that in reality he is the pillar of the national economy which is based mainly on agriculture."[19]

"Our Indian—we are assured—is by nature lazy, stubbornly opposed to work, and as soon as he has a few cents in his pocket to cover his basic needs he no longer wants to work."[20]

Beyond these kinds of characterizations, a great deal of attention is paid in the editorials to Indians as a problem and what to do about them. I have no intention here of undertaking an extensive content analysis, but it is useful to bring attention to some of the major themes that are expressed.

2. The Indian is incapable of self-direction and is easily manipulated.

"The government is obliged to be vigilant in order to improve the conditions of the Indian, that he may be useful to the fatherland, and not become that amorphous mass that allows itself to be used, unconsciously, to support the inequities of political parties which, to date, have left bloody tracks throughout the country."[21]

In the provinces, "the countryman, the illiterate, the laborer, Indian or ladino, continues in his ignorance and, consequently, continues to be a danger, to be manipulated by the perverse maneuvering of the enemy. These beings, because of their lack of consciousness, are a cloud in our sky of democratic liberties."[22]

"It pains us that these peaceful inhabitants would be contaminated by the poison of a misguided political policy with its sights set on criminality, removing them

from their fields of labor and forming them into an assault force willing to serve the perverse interests of a party that had put itself against—better said in a war to the death with—public opinion."[23]

The threat of indigenous insurgency was totally attributed to the political agitation of the *poncistas*; little was left to the possibility that the indigenes may have had long and serious legitimate complaints with the system.

3. The Indian is essential to the national economy and security.

The importance of the Indian to the national economy is given some attention. Since the advent of the Reform of the 1870s, Indians had been required by law to labor for ladino agrarian enterprises. It was extremely likely that this would disappear under the incoming revolutionary governments. The editorials, therefore, reflected a real fear of what might happen to the economy if control over Indian labor were lost.

"In reality he is the true pillar of the economy of the country, which is based principally on agriculture. The government has the obligation to be vigilant in bettering the conditions of the Indian, so that he may be useful to the fatherland."[24]

"The Indian is the substantial and dynamic being of our country." "The treasure—as we hear so often from certain people—of our country is not the unexploited mines, nor the virgin forests nor many other things, the treasure is the human element."[25]

"The salary increase for the worker in the fields should be studied more in depth, because the surplus he spends on alcohol, which gradually poisons him. The government is obliged to be vigilant in order to improve the conditions of the Indian, that he may be useful to the fatherland, and not become that amorphous mass that allows itself to be used, unconsciously, to support the inequities of political parties which to date have left bloody tracks throughout the country."[26]

4. The Indian must be regenerated through education and medicine.

Since the Indian is central to the welfare of the state, change should be done without upsetting the system. A long essay in *La Hora* , entitled "El Indio," argues that to "regenerate the Indian" it is not adequate to focus on literacy, which really often merely places Indians in the position to be be fooled by members of the "superior race." Fundamentally, it must start with the physical well-being of the Indian, and this can begin with getting rid of lice; then on to other parasites, worms, filaria, etc.[27]

Jorge Schlesinger writes, "The problem of incorporating the Indian into civilization is difficult, it requires arduous and persistent labor. Are we capable of it?

Yes, but we need the cooperation and good will of all the men who make up the country."[28]

"To those beings whose lack of consciousness is a cloud in our sky of democratic liberties, we must take the light, we must take reason to them, we must infuse the ABC of a citizenry's civilization which leads to a clear policy in the defense and benefit of the interests of the nation above any other interests, and not submit nor adhere to the arbitrariness of despotic authorities who operate outside the law."[29]

"The Indian and the ladino who never learned more than, perhaps, to spell out block letters, is not guilty if he cannot discern good from evil, and it is the duty of the rest of the Guatemalans of conscience, to show them the road to their own best interest, if they are to be part of this society. It is necessary to unify the national conscience and this can be done with patience and with only reason and patriotic honesty as guides."[30]

"Let us consider that it is much better to accomplish the effective democratization of the Indian by education, slow but sure, and not by the giant leap typical of the brusque change from oppressed to oppressors, and the evil intentions of those individuals of bad faith who would guide them or push them along troubled paths that lead only to the provocation of crime."[31]

"The Indian has to be better fed and has to be given medicines. He should be given food in accord with the number of calories which are consumed by a normal man working in the fields. A well nourished man, healthy and happy, produces more efficient work, increases his production, is more ambitious, raises his standard of living, and is anxious to improve himself every day."[32]

Finally, in some contrast to these go-slow recommendations is the editorial entitled "Indianismo y latinismo," by Ovidio Rodas Corzo that argues: "For these reasons, to strengthen the Indian culture, is to condemn our country to eternal weakness, a perpetual cultural dualism, to be always a nation of irredeemable Indians without a continental personality. Because of this, our Indians must be westernized or destroyed; but we should not keep them in their entrenched static state because we will then be only a country for tourism; of curiosities; a kind of zoo for the entertainment of tourists; but never a nation."[33]

What is impressive about the *indigenista* approach that so dominates this literature is the refusal to editorially explore the fact that ladinos know that the Indian is capable of violent reactions coupled with a studied ignoring of why these violent

reactions are so likely. *Indigenismo* was a mestizo invention that both reflected a recognition that the Indian was mistreated, while at the same time refusing to allow for the examination of the causes that produced it.

Ethnicity as Politics

An "ethnic group" refers to a *self-reproducing social collectivity identified by myths of a common provenance and by identifying markers.*[34] The identification and definition of ethnicities can take place in either or both of two ways. They may be *externally identified* by members of an another group, irrespective of whether the identification has any reality for the individuals so labeled; and/or they may be *self-identified* by individuals who thereby constitute such a group, irrespective of what outside observers think. The sociological salience of an ethnic group emerges most importantly, however, when it is both self-identified and externally identified, when its existence is significant both to members and to outsiders. Such groups are, by definition, political beings.

The *indios* or *indígenas* of Guatemala were first externally identified as a separate ethnicity by the invading Spanish in the sixteenth century. While at first not entirely sure they were human, the Spanish found them to be more useful in that category, and shortly thereafter asserted them to be a separate kind of human being, a distinct ethnicity. Where Indian chiefdoms, kingdoms, and empires were in competition with other such peoples, there already existed regional ethnicities. In Guatemala these were readily identifiable by the Spanish as the Quiché, Cakchiquel, Tzutuhil, and others. The nature of the colonial settlement policy, however, led the Spanish to break up these larger chiefdom and kingdom identifications, and and by the turn of the twentieth century the most significant self-identity among the indigenous peoples was the community or the municipio.[35] There was a pan-Indian self-identification that was known in Spanish usually as *natural*, or "native," but it lacked any self-organizing potential. The significant political ethnicity was the municipio or community, and individuals would refer to themselves as, for example, *San Pedranos* (from San Pedro), or *Maxeños* (from Santo Tomas Chichicastenango), and so on. However, there was little if any use made of the linguistic categories derived from the old kingdoms. In my own experience, the term "Cakchiquel" was not always known; people spoke not "Cakchiquel," but "lengua."

Thus, when the 1944 newspapers reported Indian uprisings, it was in terms of the Indians of Patzicia, or of Chichicastenango, or of Ostuncalco, or of San Andres Iztapa, and so on. These communities of Indians were the political beings about whom the ladinos were so apprehensive. There also existed in the ladino mind a hazy notion of the potential for a larger Indian identity. The vision of one where an Indian uprising in one town might be quickly followed by a chain reaction in other communities.

The ladinos, too, were an ethnic group by this time. While the sixteenth into the nineteenth centuries saw the emergence of racially mixed populations, the Spanish population tended to displace Indian identity in the *oriente*—what Lovell and Lutz (chapter 2) have referred to as the "colonial core—leaving a variety of racially mixed peoples who were not always easy to distinguish from Indians."[36] The emergence of coffee as a major crop in the nineteenth-century western highlands stimulated an expansion of plantation holdings, and in some instances, a specific predation on Indian-held lands.[37] This brought about a need for labor that led the coffee owners to encourage the relocation of *oriente* ladinos. Carol Smith (Chapter 4) has argued that as these people increasingly acted as merchants and administrative intermediaries between the owners and the Indian labor in the western highlands, they began to emerge as a distinctive ethnicity.[38] Thus, the ladino-Indian ethnic contrast that was so common in the anthropological literature of the 1940s to 1970s has become politically much more significant in the past one hundred years.

Ladino Strategies of Control

By 1944 control of the Indian population had grown more complex. It involved not merely the coffee producers who needed the labor, but often the ladinos who acted as agents for the landholding class. Moreover, the government generally, but most explicitly with the victory of the Liberals in the 1870s, became overtly concerned that Indians be controlled in order to provide the labor necessary for the coffee export production. The ladino control of Indians must be seen in terms of two sets of strategies. There was the more general concern of the state, explicitly expressed through the government, the landowners, and the intermediary ladinos, that constituted a *state strategy*; and there was the specific concern of the the individual ladinos, what we can call the *popular strategy*.

The ladino popular strategy involved a number of components: (1) a constant depreciation of Indian society and culture, illustrated by the commentaries described in an earlier section on the portrayal of Indian public behavior in the news; (2) a constant effort to best Indians in the market economy, manipulating state support by whatever means to reduce their control over land and share of the market; (3) using both legal and illegal devices to inhibit Indians from full political participation by keeping them from holding offices and taking on roles that would allow them to govern ladinos; (4) periodically exercising force to remind Indians that they must accept political, economical, and cultural subordination; and (5) hiding the constant fear of Indian rebellion, which enabled ladinos to work directly with Indians on farms, in labor gangs, in the kitchen, and so on.

While these strategies were clearly successful over much of the central and western highlands, there were important areas of variation. What Carol Smith has referred to as the economic core[39] identifies the region from Quezeltanango through Totonicapan as a particular development within the Indian western highlands. This core evaded much of the direct exploitation by the state control system, and both Indian communities and individual Indians were more successful in economic enterprises and in control over local affairs.

Ladino state strategies consisted not only of those that specifically benefited the individual activities, but also the exercise of policies of control by the governing bodies. In the 1944–1954 era, these materials suggest the presence of three different sets of policies: (1) those of the *Poncistas* in their attempt to obtain a victory in the 1944 elections; (2) those of the Arévalo campaign and governing regime, 1944–1951; and (3) those of the Arbenz regime, 1951–1954.

The immediate inheritors of the Ubico regime were Ponce and the "Liberals," also called the "Progressive Liberals." They explicitly offered German finca land to the Indians in return for political support in an overtly cynical effort to create a kind of unsolicited populism, but also to play on the fears, distrust, and hatred that the Indians felt so strongly concerning the Ladinos. Comments in the news articles make it clear that the media were wholly in support of the Arévalo candidacy, and that it regarded the efforts to stir up Indian unrest by Ponce as evil and traitorous to the national (read, "ladino") interests.

The Guatemalan revolution of 1944–1954 has long been recognized as an essentially bourgeois revolution, and there is little question that the general position

taken by the incoming Arévalo regime did not diverge from the classic line of liberal interests in nineteenth-century capitalistic expansion. While clearly the legitimate inheritors of the Ubico "Progressive Liberal" regime, the *Poncistas'* indigenous policies were superficially most akin to those of the nineteenth-century conservatives. The Arevalistas may have been revolutionary, but they were a liberal bourgeois whose views generally reflected the *indigenista* view evident in the editorials.

Arévalo's administration did introduce a good many social reforms, but those directed at the countryside were more aimed at the rural labor on farms than at the Indian as a semi-independent *campesino*. The Law of Forced Rentals required that landholders rent their excess lands at reasonable rates, and this challenged the notion of totally private control over property. While there has been no study, it is my impression that it was more effective in the eastern part of the country among ladinos than among Indians in the western highlands. Indians did receive some notice through the establishment of the National Indian Institute, but the organization was funded solely to carry on research and had no active function. Perhaps the most important change that directly affected Indian-ladino relations was the opening up of the election, and even more, clearing the way for Indians to hold civic posts. The election of Indians as mayors of towns came as a real shock to landholding ladinos.[40]

The issues became clear in February 1945, when the constitutional convention considered a special "Indian Statute" that contained articles providing protection for Indian individual and communal lands, promoting cooperatives, and favoring intensive training in the Spanish language. The convention, however, rejected it. Two major newspapers took different sides of the issue: *La Hora* was against the statutes, while *El Imparcial* favored them, and the editors of both periodicals were active as members of the convention.

La Hora argued that since the immense majority of the population is indígena, there was no reason to have a special section of the constitution dedicated to them. The bettering of the Indian population should be the direct task of the Ministry of Public Education, and not a fiction of a statute.[41]

El Imparcial argued in an unsigned editorial that the great protestations about the Indians' importance in evidence prior to the elections were now being forgotten:

> It appears that at the hour of the debate, the principle prevailed that it was not wise to establish racial discrimination, nor was there any

> reason to consider the Indians' legal position to be different from that of the Mestizo or white or population of any other color; all should be equal before the law.
>
> In fact, however, it [the statute] did not deal with fixing racial discrimination, but rather to accept a reality unquestionable in our country; the Indians who compose an immense majority of the Guatemalan population, live permanently unconnected with other groups and, in spite of their number, they ought to be considered as a social class and economically weak. The question is not whether the Indian is inferior or superior to others; what we should ask is: how long are we going to continue considering the Indian as an element foreign to our condition as a civilized people, and to become seriously preoccupied with helping him to escape his abandoned position and the virtual vassalage in which he has lived?[42]

The incomplete presidential term of Jacobo Arbenz (1951-1954) began to suggest significant changes in the strategies of control, and moved in some important ways to the left of Arévalo's position. For Arbenz the strategy of control was more complicated since he decided to directly confront landholder and military hostility.[43] He both established the agrarian reform and sought to neutralize the military by providing arms to *campesinos*, an effort that was blocked when discovered by the army. As is well known, his policies were ultimately brought to ground by the combined efforts of the internal opposition and the United States CIA.

In the present context, however, it is important to note that like Arévalo, Arbenz did not promote policies that identified Indians as a particularly problematic population. The emerging labor unions, *campesino* leagues, and political parties did not form along specifically ethnic lines. The law of Forced Rentals and the agrarian reform did not single out Indians, but rather treated *campesinos* as a class. It is perhaps ironic that the failure to target Indians meant that when Arbenz was thrown out and Castillo Armas took over in 1954, the new regime also did not take out its ire particularly on Indians; the favors provided by the reforms were withdrawn from whosoever had received them (i.e., the *campesinos*) of either ethnic group.

Indian Strategies of Control

The strategies available to the Indians were few, basically those commonly available to the weak: playing off one party against another; the occasional use of violence under limited circumstances; and retreat, avoidance, and humility. The last of these is classically one of the most effective strategies of survival. In human terms it exacts a fearful toll in misery, both psychological and physical, and can reduce a population to a level of existence that is by any measure unacceptable. However, over the long run, the potential for action survives.

In hindsight, both of the other strategies—manipulation by dividing superior powers, and occasional violence—were important. The first was, of course, being promoted through the efforts of the *Poncistas*. The second, violence, had been irregular. What is curious is that they are strategies that cannot be carried out unless there is some kind of coordination among the Indians of different communities. What scared the ladinos about the Ponce's offer of land was that Indian uprisings were (ultimately) reported in communities scattered all the way from the Honduran to the Mexican border, and in independent communities as well as on plantations. It is important to note that almost all of them (mentioned by Handy[44]) were Indian populations. The revolutionary Liberals attributed this apparent coordination to the prevalance and cleverness of the Ponce agents. What they were not allowing for (or were suppressing with the usual amnesia) was that the Indians were the ones that acted, no matter who did the agitation.

Resorting to violence had been an Indian practice since the conquest—and presumably before. What the Spanish succeeded in doing, and the ladinos after them, was to make violence an extremely costly strategy through bloody reprisals. McCreery has argued that in the late nineteenth century, as the pressure from the Liberal regime forced Indians into great submission for the development of coffee, the regime succeeded in reducing the level of Indian violence.[45] Major slaughters in Momostenango and San Juan Ixcoy in the 1880s served as warnings that McCreery thinks may have quieted possible action in other towns.

Whatever else may have occurred during the intervening years, by 1944 the Indians were in a condition that led them to respond publicly over much of the country. There is no evidence that they were coordinated beyond responding to the common stimulus of the *Poncista* overtures. In at least one basic way, this was

probably similar to the response elicited by the guerrilleros in the late 1970s, and that led to a clandestine sympathy toward the insurgency on the part of perhaps as many as 500,000 Indians.[46] While in both instances non-Indian agents were systematically at work trying to organize the Indians into some coherent action, it must, again, be noted that the Indians were clearly ready to act.

Hindsight provides historians with the enviable crutch of knowing what happened later. The full significance of Indian strategy and of the 1944 events in ethnic relations would not be evident for some decades to come. In that era the Indians who rebelled against ladino authority were community-based Indians. There was no suggestion of a nationwide Indian ethnicity. However, the nationwide suppression of *campesinos* and the fear that followed on the victory of Castillo Armas' "Liberation" forces certainly contributed to a broader awareness of potential Indian identification at the national level.

It must be recognized that many things happened in the 1950s and 1960s, and to attribute the nationalization of the Indian ethnicity only to the effects of a frustrated revolution, and particularly to a revolution that itself gave little attention to Indians, is not convincing. However, there is also little question that the revolutionary decade, especially the Arbenz phase, marked a sociological awakening that was not squelched by subsequent repressions, but that provided the groundwork for the revolutionary era that is with us today. An awareness of potential change was evident to the present writer in the 1950s.[47] A broader Indian identity became visible in the streets by the regionalization of Indian clothing in the1960s, and clearly evident in the increasing number of Indian professionals and revolutionary activity in the 1970s and 1980s. All this constitutes the emergence of a national-level Indian identity. Through the presence both of educated Indians with a national and international perspective and of Indians with active experience in insurgency, both groups familiar with the history of ethnic relations in Guatemala and comparable models available elsewhere in the world, the Guatemalan Indian was launched on the formation of a new Guatemalan indigenous ethnicity. However, just as the earlier community ethnicities could also recognize a wider population of *naturales*, so those involved in the development of the national Indian ethnic group are equally aware of a broader identity with aboriginal peoples elsewhere in the world.

The real significance of the events of the 1944–1954 revolution lie in this. It was the period when indigenous peoples, because they were given access to new

rights as *campesinos* by a revolutionary government, began to recognize that social change was possible. The history of the trajectory of the emergence of the national Indian Identity is, however, only beginning to be written.[48]

The Captive Strategists

We have thus far discussed the images and strategies of 1944 as if they were embedded in a kind of partisan dispute. This is not unreasonable since they contain the residue of an unfinished conquest. Indian-ladino ethnic relations did not derive from migrations that accepted a subordinate role within the state structure—as did the Chinese, Germans, or Lebanese. Rather, they derive from the fact that while the Indians were forcefully subordinated by conquest, they were never assimilated within the Spanish derived society. Moreover, the Spanish, and their mestizo and ladino successors, depended on the Indian as the central source of labor for their own welfare and development. To the degree that the Spanish and ladinos displaced the Indian population from their own bases of subsistence, this also created an economic dependence of the Indian on the ladino-controlled production system. They are, thus, locked in a fear-ridden embrace from which neither can easily escape.

Thus, through the colonial era, but much enhanced by the nineteenth-century export coffee cultivation, there emerged what was at once an agrarian class-based exploitative system based on political and religious subordination, and an ethnic differentiation that sought its rationalizing myth in socially and biologically inherited differences between the two populations.

The situation that thus evolved was structurally intolerable and, therefore, dynamic; it incorporated an active mechanism for the generation of its own destruction. The well known basis of the mechanism was the constant suppression of the Indian population and the intentional marginalization from political and economic success. Whatever may have been the Indians' feelings about this, certainly hatred of the Spaniard, the Mestizo, the ladino, has for centuries been a recurrent emotion. Since the suppressors periodically resorted to violence to enforce their interests, fear has been a constant motivation in Indian behavior; moreover, it has intentionally been cultivated by the Spanish and ladinos.

Fear and hatred, clearly and logically strong motivational forces within the Indian population, are not found there alone. They equally motivate ladino behavior.

The image of the Indian as being uncivilized and somewhat bestial carries with it the fear of the unknown and uncontrolled. Indians—following the *indigenista* argument—must be civilized because, if not, they are unpredictable and may run wild committing all sorts of mayhem. The ladino fear of Indian rebellion is clearly present in the 1944 reports from Patzicia, Quezeltenango, San Andres Itzapa, and San Juan Ostuncalco.

What the contrast between the news reporting and the editorial writing in the 1944 accounts shows is that a powerful reluctance exists to speak openly of the anxiety and hostility that lie so close to the surface of the relationship. For years the clear and unquestioned manner to contain the implications of these emotions has been to refuse to deal with them. They are not to be spoken of in public.

There is little discussion of fear and hatred in the news articles. The quality that runs so deep in the ladino-Indian relational systems is all but ignored, and the only reason given for Indian hostile behavior is that they are being manipulated by the evil *Poncistas* and Liberals. They are portrayed as capable of no self-generated action, as only responding to evil ladino stimuli. Of equal interest is that the editorials give little suggestion that killing and death are the central events. They seemed to be principally concerned with the idea that the Indian problem stems from the Indian's lack of civilization, and that its solution can only be sought in terms of changing the Indian's society. The fault and responsibility lie entirely with the Indians. Of all the editorials, only that by Luis Cardoza y Aragón seriously suggests that some change would be appropriate in ladino conduct.

No mention is made of the Indian need for land. Probably because Indian labor is essential to national (read, "bourgeois ladino") welfare, to give them land would mean they would be less available to work for the ladinos, and increase the direct competition for land with the ladinos. While such expressions are not common, an extreme position is expressed in a guest editorial by J. M. Paniagua, who specifically addresses the need to retain the vagrancy law to assure that work will be done: "So long as there is no vagrancy law that accords with our needs, the suppression of the 'work card' would deal agriculture a mortal blow. It is argued that it is a harsh law, but our Indian requires harshness as long as he cannot meet his own needs. Who would criticise a farmer for putting a laborer in the local jail because the laborer does not want his child to go to school? Harshness, they might say; but harshness necessary to lift this child from the ignorance in which his father has lived."[49]

This, of course, reflects the classic Liberal *indigenismo* position as expressed by Antonio Batres Jáuregui in 1893, where he simultaneously argues that the Indian should be removed from his communal lands, but be required to work on private lands. However, Batres Jáuregui differs from the 1944 editorials, for he recognizes directly that "the system has been to take the lands away from the Indians, to obligate them to work like slaves under the forced labor laws, not pay them more than a pittance for their labor on the fincas of certain potentates, sell them corn beer and cheap liquor in plenty, maintain them in crassest stupidity; in a word, treat them worse than the severest sixteenth century conqueror or the the barbarous *encomendero* torturer and hangman."[50]

This difference between Batres Jáuregui and the 1944 material might suggest a significant change over the half century that separates these works. The earlier work does not hesitate to point up some prime reasons why Indians are in the condition they are in. One of the major characteristics of the ladino's position is a reluctance to bring these things up for discussion or, indeed, even to recognize them. Thus, when an event such as Patzicia and the surrounding cases of Indian "unrest" occurred in late 1944, they were the cause of newspaper alarm and militant reaction, and not for a socially sophisticated political response. Little attention is paid to the accumulated frustration of the Indian community that had experienced centuries of political-economic subordination and exploitation under the pressure of state power.

Indeed, the contrast between the editorial focus on *indiginesta* solutions for "the Indian problem" and the news reports of Indian mayhem reveals a national amnesia within the ladino population concerning Indian-ladino relations. There is never a clear sense that the problems can be submitted to reasonable or open analysis, debate, or discussion. To bring these things up for discussion is threatening; it elicits the fear. How can ladinos work directly with Indians on farms, live as neighbors, share community responsibilities with them, depend on them for crucial elements in their life support, and at the same time admit to a fundamental fear of them? The most obvious answer is to deny it; to create other myths, myths that keep things quiet.

The news reports and editorials tell us little about the Indian view of the matter. It is clear that they fear the ladinos, but whether they spoke of it, whether they were willing to discuss it, is not discussed by the ladino voices of the press. But the very silence suggests that, for the ladinos at least, the relationship is not open for discussion.

Today the Indian population is making itself heard on the national scene. It is still barely recognized by ladinos; they tend to treat Indian diputados in congress as a kind of game, and simply pay little heed to the growing Indian bourgeoisie that is as ambivalent about but perturbed by the suppression of the ethnicity as it is desirous of the capitalist "good life." In 1944, the only way their concern reached public notice (i.e., ladino notice) was when they resorted to public demonstrations, and brought some force to bear on the scene. Today, the continuing silence of the ladinos suggests that they are not yet ready to explore another avenue.

NOTES

1. This is part of a work in progress. The newpaper material was gathered by Lic. Oscar Adolfito Haeussler Paredes. Arturo Arias, Edelberto Torres Rivas, José Antonio Montes, Julio Vielman, and Betty H. Adams offered helpful observations, but are not responsible for the product.

2. Evidence for this is not direct, but is repeated in the many complaints leveled by the opponents; it is hoped that further research will clarify the nature of Ponce's action.

3. To appear in *Americas*. I am indebted to the author for prepublication access to the paper.

4. *Nuestro Diario*, 25 October 1944, editorial by José Valle.

5. *El Imparcial*, 2 November, 1944.

6. A study of the Patzicia case is currently underway.

7. *El Imparcial*, 18 November 1944.

8. *El Imparcial*, 30 November 1944.

9. *El Imparcial*, 5 December 1944.

10. *Nuestro Diario*, 25 October 1944.

11. *Nuestra Diario*, 26 October 1944. Also see, Handy, 1984, 105.

12. *La Hora*, 20 February 1945.

13. *El Imparcial*, 10 January 1945.

14. *El Imparcial*, 19 December 1944.

15. Cited in Handy (Note 2, above), from Sol Tax, "Notes on Santo Tomas Chichicastenango," Microfilm Collection of Manuscripts on Middle American Cultural Anthropology, No. 16, 1947.

16. Handy (Note 2, above); from Schlesinger, 1946, p. 6.

17. *El Imparcial*, 10 January 1945.

18. Rufinio Guerra Cortrave, *El Imparcial*, 19 December 1944.

19. J. Schlesinger, *La Hora*, 26 November 1944.

20. *El Imparcial*, 12 February 1945, unsigned editorial under title *Opiniones diversis por los braceros.*

21. Ibid.

22. Rufino Guerra Cortave, *La Hora*, 8 November 1944.

23. José Valle, *Nuestro Diario*, 25 October 1944.

24. J. Schlesinger, *La Hora*, 26 November 1944.

25. René Arandi Pinot, *El Libertador*, 27 December 1944.

26. J. Schlesinger, *La Hora*, 26 November 1944.

27. *La Hora*: editorials appearing 9,13, and 15 November 1944.

28. *La Hora*, 26 November 1944.

29. Rufino Guerra Cortave, *El Imparcial*, 8 November 1944.

30. Ibid.

31. *El Libertador*, 9 October 1944.

32. *La Hora*, 26 November 1944.

33. *La Hora*, 19 & 20 February 1945.

34. This working definition was devised for this research.

35. The classic definition is found in Sol Tax, "The Municipios of the Midwestern Highlands of Guatemala," *American Anthropologist* 39:423-444, 1937.

36. Ibid.

37. David McCreery's paper, ibid., recounts this general situation. Arturo Arias called my attention to the efforts of Carrera to bring ladinos into the western highlands.

38. Carol Smith, "The Origins of the National Question in Guatemala," in R. Fox, ed., *The Production of Nations and Nationalism.*

39. Carol Smith, "Beyond Dependency Theory: National and Regional Patterns of Underdevelopment in Guatemala," *American Ethnologist*, Vol. 5, No. 3, pp. 574-617, 1978.

40. The significance of an Indian becoming the town mayor was called to my attention by Edelberto Torres Rivas, in conversation.

41. By H. M. Vasquez in *La Hora*, 27 February 1945.

42. *El Imparcial*, 26 February 1945.

43. The opposition to the landholders was intentional; he did not seek military opposition, but found it as his ideological position moved to the left. See the forthcoming work on this subject by Piero Gleijeses.

44. See Note 2.

45. Ibid. I must confess to some hesitation in accepting McCreery's argument here. Slaughters have perhaps deterred particular populations, and some things can act as examples for others. But it is clear that in the 1944–1952 period the Patzicia slaughter did not stop Indian uprisings. Nor did the 1978 massacres at Panzos in the Spanish Embassy have much effect on stopping Indian interest in further political action. It may be that because the number killed in Panzos was not readily available in the press, it did not serve as a terrifying example. (On Panzos, see Ana Beatriz Mendizábal P., "Estado y políticas de desarrollo agrario: La masacre campesino de Panzo´s," *Politicia y Sociedad*, No. l6, julio-diciembre 1978, pp. 69–121.)

46. An estimate made by a long-time, nonparticipant, resident of the central highlands.

47. Newbold, Stokes (R. N. Adams), "Receptivity to Communist-Fomented Agitation in Rural Guatemala," *Economic Development and Cultural Change* 5, No. 4, p. 360, 1957.

48. Arturo Arias' chapter, ibid., is a significant contribution to this subject.

49. *El Imparcial*, 2 December 1945, editorial under title *Opiniones diversis por los braceros.*

50. Batres Jauregui, Antonio, *Los Indios: Su historia y su civilizacion.* Guatemala: Est. Tipog. La Union. 1894, p. 193.